

16
The Blessed Virgin Vindicated.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, BALTIMORE,

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 25TH, 1855,

THE FEAST OF

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY;

BY THE

REV. CHARLES WOODRUFF RANKIN,

RECTOR OF THE CHURCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BALTIMORE:
JOSEPH ROBINSON.

1855.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

TO THE
BISHOP OF MARYLAND,
THE EARNEST CONTENDER FOR
"THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS,"
This Sermon,
PREACHED IN HIS DIOCESE,
AND PUBLISHED WITH HIS APPROBATION,
IS RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, JESUS CHRIST Himself being the Chief Corner Stone ; grant that, by the operation of the HOLY GHOST, all Christians may be so joined together in unity of spirit, and in the bond of peace, that they may be an Holy Temple acceptable unto Thee. And especially, to this congregation present, give the abundance of thy grace ; that with one heart, they may desire the prosperity of Thy Holy Apostolic Church, and with one mouth, may profess the Faith once delivered to the Saints. Defend them from the sins of heresy and schism ; “ let not the foot of pride come nigh to hurt them, nor the hand of the ungodly to cast them down.” And grant that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness ; that so they may walk in the ways of truth and peace, and at last be numbered with Thy Saints in glory everlasting ; through Thy merits, O blessed JESUS, Thou gracious Bishop and Shepherd of our souls, Who art, with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, one GOD, world without end. *Amen.*

S E R M O N .

AND THE ANGEL CAME IN UNTO HER AND SAID, HAIL THOU THAT ART HIGHLY FAVORED, THE LORD IS WITH THEE ; BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.

St. Luke i. 28.

THIS is the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the day when we commemorate the mission of the Angel Gabriel from "*the presence of God*," to announce to an humble Virgin "*of the house and lineage of David*," that she should be the mother of the Saviour of the world. It is the day which marks the conception by the HOLY GHOST, of Him who was "*made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*."* It is the day from which we date the *Incarnation of the SON of God*. The incarnation, therefore, is the theme which comes before us prominently at this time, and it is for this reason that we are taught to pray, "that, as we have known the incarnation of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST, by the message of an angel, so by His cross and passion, we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection."†

But there is another subject suggested by the lessons of this day, and one which it is peculiarly desirable at this time, that we should clearly understand—it is *the Blessedness of the Virgin Mary*. And it is desirable, because by some,

* Gal. iv. 45.

† Collect for the annunciation of the B. V. M.

that honor is denied her, which the HOLY GHOST Himself assures us she should have; while by others, it is exaggerated until it culminates in blasphemy, in heresy and schism. The truth, like HIM who *is* the TRUTH, is crucified between two thieves—the one would rob the Blessed Virgin of her blessedness; the other would corrupt that blessedness, and transform it into sin.

I wish, therefore, at this time, to bring before you clearly, the just medium which the Church observes between these two extremes; and show you on the one hand, in what her blessedness does not; and on the other, in what it does consist.

That there is a peculiar blessedness belonging to the Virgin Mary, no believer in the inspiration of the Scriptures can for a moment doubt.

The Angel Gabriel, charged with the message from the throne of God, saluted her; “*Hail thou that art highly favored, the LORD is with thee, blessed art thou among women.*”* Her cousin Elizabeth, moved by the HOLY GHOST, said to her, “*Blessed art thou among women;*”† while she herself, under the same holy inspiration, foretold that *thenceforth all generations should call her Blessed.*‡

This is the language of the Scriptures; the testimony which GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT has left on record, to shew the Virgin’s blessedness. And they who deny to her this honor, and refuse to own her blessedness, in this respect deny the Scriptures, and refuse the witness of the HOLY GHOST. But all truth may be perverted, and the experience of the past, and the developments of the present, have given us a fearful witness that Satan has used this graceful truth as a subtle snare for the souls of men; and that it has been distorted, perverted, and corrupted, until by it, GOD

* St. Luke, i. 2.

† St. Luke, i. 42.

‡ St. Luke, i. 48.

has been dishonored, and the SAVIOUR torn from His mediatorial throne, and she herself degraded from her blessed station as "*the handmaid of the LORD*,"* into the new, and to the Church, the false and unknown posture of a mediatrix and an intercessor for mankind. Honor becomes dishonor, and glory turns to shame, when truth is sacrificed.

Let us see to it that we hold the truth, just as the Scriptures have revealed it, and as the Church has taught it.

In what then does the Virgin's blessedness consist? That she was a saintly woman, none can doubt. No reverent mind can for a moment think, that the Mother of our LORD stood lower than the highest saint in personal holiness. Little as the Scriptures have preserved concerning her character and history, they teach enough to shew that she possessed those ornaments of "*a meek and quiet spirit*," which, in the sight of God, are of great price. She was of a royal lineage. "*A just man*," Joseph, chose her in espousals. She was an humble woman. She was a quiet and a thoughtful woman. She was an obedient woman. She was a faithful woman; conceiving, as St. Augustine teaches, her SAVIOUR in her heart, before she bare Him in her womb. True, like other women, she had her weaknesses; as all God's saints have had; but when we see an humble, an obedient and a faithful woman, we find one whom "a just man" may espouse, and whom God Himself will bless.

But these are not the charms which make the Virgin Mary "Blessed" in our eyes. They are the features of her personal character which we should admire and love—but that which marks her out as *blessed among women*, is something different; it is peculiar to herself, and demands a more minute consideration.

*St. Luke, i. 38.

This blessedness, which is her's alone, is, that she was chosen from "*among women*," to be the mother of the SON of GOD. She was honored above all the mothers in Israel, in giving birth to the *Messiah*; that thus the prophecy might be fulfilled, "*Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name IMMANUEL.*"* She was exalted above all others, as the *woman whose seed should bruise the serpent's head.*† She was blessed above all others, in supplying from her human nature, that humanity which linked the LORD of *Glory* to the manhood which He came to save. Blessed, as the chaste tabernacle in which the SON of GOD was pleased to dwell. Blessed, as the mother who bore the Holy Child JESUS; "who nursed Him at her breast; who watched over His tender years; who received from Him a perfect love and obedience, such as no child has ever rendered to a parent; with whom, for thirty years of His life, He continued hidden, as it were, from all the world beside; and whom, in the agonies of death, He made the object of His tender care."

This is the Virgin's blessedness. It is nothing personal as to her own character; it is particular as to GOD's will. He chose her as a fitting vessel to receive His grace—a shrine in which His Son might dwell; and from its embryotic life unite Himself with our humanity. Blessed, not in herself, but as the *handmaid of the LORD*. Thus far the Scriptures teach; and thus the Church, has, from the first believed.

But there are other teachings in the world. As in the ancient Church of GOD, the Scribes and Pharisees taught "*for doctrines the commandments of men*;" and "*made the commandment of GOD of none effect by their traditions*"—so has the Church of Rome corrupted and defiled His

* Is. vii. 14.

† Gen. iii. 15.

Word, and preached another Gospel than that the SAVIOUR taught; and “*changed the truth of GOD into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the CREATOR, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*” And, as of old, the serpent used the woman as the snare to lead man into sin—so, as his fiercest, subtlest act of hatred against *the woman’s Seed*, has he turned, and stung that portion of the Church, and, *by a lie, would make the very mother, whose Seed has bruised his head, the instrument to rob Him of His glory.*

For now we find the fearful doctrine taught, that she has shared with Him the office of a mediator between GOD and man; nay! that her maternal heart yearns with a sympathy which He, *who “was in all points tempted like as we are,”** cannot know—and, though “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities,*”† He is less ready than is she to hear and answer prayer. We find, that though the Scripture teaches that there is one only way of access to the throne of GOD, through Him who is the WAY,‡ yet now another and a surer entrance is discovered through His Virgin Mother. We find, that though He taught that “*no man cometh to the FATHER*” but by Him||—yet now, another way is found by her. We hear, that while the Scriptures tell us of “*one mediator between GOD and man, the MAN CHRIST JESUS,*”§ Rome tells us of a *woman* who is a tenderer advocate. We find, that though the Word of GOD has told us of the exaltation of that “*MAN CHRIST JESUS,*” the purchase of His sufferings and death, that it is He who is exalted far above the Heavens, “*angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him,*”¶ yet she is now accosted as *the Queen of angels and of men.* We find, that while our SAVIOUR, “*the High-Priest of our profession,*”** like His prototype of old, has

* Heb. iv. 15. † Heb. iv. 15. ‡ John xiv. 6. || John xiv. 6. § 1 Tim. ii. 5.

¶ Eph. i. 20–21; 1 Peter iii. 22. ** Heb. iii. 1. ix. 7–12.

entered alone into the holiest place, we now are taught that she has entered with Him, and stands not only with Him as an intercessor, but as the one through whom we must approach Him. We find, that while on earth He checked her forwardness, and rebuked her when she dared to trespass on the ground peculiar to His higher nature,* yet now, although He is exalted “*to the right hand of the Majesty on high*,”† *she may command Him, as a mother would a child, to do her will*. And now, as the last daring act of sin, we Christians, living in this nineteenth century, and holding to the faith which from the first has been received, are told, on peril of damnation, that we must believe her spotless from original corruption, when the Bible and the Church have always taught us, that He *only was without sin*.

I am sure, my brethren, that the importance of the theme before me will secure your close attention to my argument, and excuse me if I trespass longer than is usual, on your time.

I believe that there are two ideas which lie at the root of all these errors—one, that the Blessed Virgin is the co-agent in the dispensation of God’s grace to man—the other, that she was herself exempted from original corruption, and so was fitted for the exalted station to which her worshippers assign her. The first of these false ideas is incorporated into the inmost heart of Romish worship;‡ the last is now declared at Rome, to be *de fide*, an article of Christian faith.

The first of these positions is based upon the angel’s salutation to the Blessed Virgin. “*Hail, thou that art*

* St. John ii. 4; St. Luke ii. 49; and St. Augustine’s, St. Athanasius’s and St. Chrysostom’s comments in loc.

† Heb. i. 3.

‡ Almost any modern work of devotion in the Romish Church, will show the truth of this remark. Indeed, it is no longer, as once, denied, but openly advocated. The last Encyclical letter of the Pope is *infallible authority*.

highly favored," is our translation from the original Greek, and conveys a good idea of its meaning. The Romish version (not a translation from the original) renders it, "*Hail, full of grace*," and the interpretation put upon it is, that she is "*full of grace*," not as the chosen one of God *to be the mother of the LORD*, but "*full of grace*," as the *dispenser of it to mankind*. Nor is this the only instance in which a false translation has served to give a plausible appearance to Roman errors.

Now, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we find the same word used by St. Paul, and from his usage of it there, we may learn the angel's usage of it here. The Apostle is speaking of the blessings we receive through Jesus Christ, and says, (according to our translation,) "*wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*."* Now the same word is used by the HOLY GHOST, speaking by St. Paul, which He used in speaking by the Angel Gabriel. And in both instances the meaning is the same. It conveys the idea of grace and favor on the part of God, and this *shewn forth more gloriously from the want of merit on the part of man*—God choosing out from among mankind those who should illustrate His glorious grace. To those "*chosen in Christ Jesus*," the members of His Church, "*the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace*,"†—to her, chosen from among the women of Israel, His gracious favor, as the one whom He would honor as the mother of His Son. In neither case is there room for inherent or *antecedent* merit; in both there is God's grace. He chose her, as He chose the Ephesian Christians, out of His mere good will, not that she was pure, not that she had merit in herself, not that she was full of antecedent grace to diffuse to others; but because He willed to take her to Himself, and from

* Eph. i. 6.

† Eph. i. 7.

her to take that human nature, which, in the person of His Son, should link man's nature to His own. It was all of grace from Him, and all of highest favor to herself. And it were as wise to worship any of God's saints, because they are His *servants*, as to worship her because she is His *handmaid*. And it is no less absurd to expect from them the grace He gives them, than to look to her as "*full of grace*" to satisfy our wants.

She was most highly favored by her God; she was filled with the divine presence for the exalted honor she received as the mother of the SAVIOUR of mankind—but not to be His rival in their worship and their love. No, brethren, the Scriptures teach us of one only Advocate, one only Mediator, one only Intercessor. They tell us of one only way of access to the throne of God. They speak of One alone, filled with "*the fullness of the Godhead*." They know one only channel through which God's grace can flow to man. It is by JESUS CHRIST, through Whom alone our prayers can rise, through Whom alone His blessings can descend. It is by JESUS CHRIST, "*the MAN CHRIST JESUS*," and *the LORD our God*, the living and the everlasting link which binds together God and *man*.

But I have stated that there is another false idea lying at the root of Romish errors in the worship of the Virgin Mary. It is, that she was herself so pure, so holy, so far removed from all corruption in her nature, that she was fitted for an exaltation to which no other could attain. That she was lifted up so far above her kind, that she could be removed from earth to heaven, and there receive the honor of "*the Queen of Heaven*,"* and the homage, both

* One cannot but be forcibly reminded by this title, and the worship it secures, of that burning incense, and pouring out drink-offerings, and making cakes to worship the Queen of Heaven, which the prophet mentions as a sin against the LORD. Jer. xliv. 17-19. *et seq.*

of angels and of men. And now we see that this idea is presented in its strictest theological form; and, by a formal declaration from the See of Rome, is bound upon the consciences of Christians, to be received, believed and held by them, even as they believe the *eternal* GODHEAD of the *Virgin's* SON; and this, on peril of damnation. The papal dogma now sets forth explicitly, that "*by a singular privilege and grace of God, in virtue of the merits of JESUS CHRIST, the SAVIOUR of mankind, Mary, His mother, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.*" This is the decree emanating from the so-called chair of St. Peter. St. Peter himself has taught us "*to be always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us;*"* and that you, my brethren, may be able to give this answer, I ask that you would follow me while I sketch, as briefly as I may, the reasons, both from doctrine and from history, why we reject this dogma as blasphemous, heretical and schismatical, and therefore fatal to the faith and hope of Christians. I speak advisedly, when I say that this dogma is blasphemous, heretical and schismatical. It is blasphemous, for it trenches on the honor due only to the Incarnate SON of GOD. It is heretical, for it contradicts the Bible, and is opposed to the received teachings of the Church of CHRIST, and is an unauthorized and dangerous addition to "*the faith once delivered to the saints,*" as handed down to us in the Catholic creeds. And it is schismatical, for it widens still more fearfully the breach which Rome, with her own hands, has made, between herself and the other branches of the Church.

First, as to the history of this false opinion. Its origin is comparatively recent. The Word of God, which is the treasure-house of truth, knows nothing of it. On the con-

* 1 Peter iii. 15.

trary, it stands opposed to the express teachings of the Scriptures. From them we learn, that CHRIST only was without sin; that He only “*was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.*”^{*} They teach us most explicitly, that the sin which “*entered in the world by one,*”[†] has “*passed on all;*” that “*all have sinned;*”[‡] that “*the Scripture hath concluded all under sin;*” that “*there is none righteous, no, not one;*”^{||} that all men are conceived and born in sin; and that the HOLY ONE, born of the Virgin Mary, was alone exempted from the stain. We must look later than the Scriptures for the immaculate conception of His blessed mother.

Nor can we find it in the early councils of the Church. Although those councils were engaged in the most exact discussion of the Incarnation of the SAVIOUR; and in some, the honor and the title which were due the Blessed Virgin were defined with theological accuracy, yet in none is there the slightest vestige of the notion, that she was free from the corruption which has passed on all men. The idea was not even entertained. It was not then a possibility. It was reserved for a later and a darker age to give it birth. Nor in the writings of the Fathers can we find the origin of this strange dogma. We find enough to show us that it was *not* known; enough to show us that had it then been broached, it would, like other heresies, have been condemned. Thus St. Augustine says:§ “*Mary, the mother of CHRIST, was born in original sin; but she did not bear CHRIST in sin, for she conceived Him, not in the ordinary course of nature, but by the HOLY GHOST.*” And again, the body of CHRIST, although assumed from the substance of the Virgin,

^{*} Heb. vii. 26. [†] Rom. v. 12. [‡] Rom. iii. 23. ^{||} Gal. iii. 22; Rom. iii. 10.

§ St. Augustine c. Julian vi., vol. x., p. 2101; St. Augustine de Genesi ad Lituam xviii., vol. iii., p. 431; St. Augustine de Fide c. 23.

*who was conceived from the ordinary propagation of sinful flesh, yet, inasmuch as the flesh of Christ was not conceived in the same way as her flesh was conceived,** was not itself sinful flesh, but, as the Apostle teaches, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. And again, He therefore *alone*, Who, being made Man, remained God, never had any sin, nor assumed a flesh of sin, *although coming from a maternal flesh of sin.*"† It would carry me far beyond my limits to multiply quotations on this subject, although they might be multiplied, and among their authors would be found Bishops of the Church of Rome, no less infallible than he who now occupies their seat, *who deny* the dogma which *he declares* to be an article of Christian faith.

But in the fifth century we find the germ of this strange heresy, and planted, as was meet, by one who was a heretic. Pelagius, who denied the doctrine of original sin, and with it the correlative doctrines of baptismal regeneration and the need of sanctifying grace, (the forerunner of the modern advocates of the inherent dignity of human nature, and the self-sufficiency of man to regenerate himself,) he was the author of this vain conceit. And it is remarkable, that he argues just as the modern heretics at Rome have argued, *that it is necessary for our religion that we should hold the Virgin to be sinless, lest we should hold the SAVIOUR to be born in sin.* Here, then, from a heretic, condemned and held as such by all the Church, we find the starting point of the strange heresy before us. Then it was a germ, but it has had the growth of centuries; it has budded and blossomed, and now has ripened, bearing seed after its own kind, the seeds of sin and blasphemy and death. But let

* St. Augustine contra Julian Pelagian v xv., vol. x., p. 1133.

† St. Augustine de Peccat. Meritis ii. 24-38, quoted by the Abbe Laborde, in his letter to Pius IX.

us trace its progress, and watch the growth of this false *tare*, sown by the adversary in the Church.

For many years it slept, or seemed to sleep, growing up, men knew not how. But it is remarkable, that with the growth of Romish usurpation, not only this, but other evil seeds, sown by the same dark hand, grew up, until, when *that* had reached its climax, *these* also broke forth into a fearful life. They grew together, *pari-passu*. And in the twelfth century, the culminating point of Papal power, this dogma startled men by its strange appearance. And it is here its proper history begins. Before this time, new honors had been heaped upon the Virgin, new festivals established to enhance her glory, new prayers devised and rosaries invented for her praise: but now a new idea, (new to the Church, but old to Satan,) was obtruded. It was, *that she was sinless from the womb, sinless from her first conception*; or, to speak with theological accuracy, that *she was conceived without the stain of sin*. "Before this time," says the learned Andrew Rivet, "this honor was accorded only to the Son of God, nor for a thousand years was the question agitated in the Church, except by those who denied original sin in all."*

The earliest record of the *Feast of the Conception* is found in English history, and in such a way as to show us that when introduced it was confessed to be a novelty, was only partially observed, and was not *designed or supposed to involve the idea of an immaculate conception*. Matthew Paris records the visit of an Armenian Patriarch to the monastery of St. Alban, who, on being questioned as to the observance of the Feast of the Conception in his country, replied, "that it was celebrated, and *for the same reason that the conception of St. John the Baptist was observed*; but, as to the conception of the LORD, *who was conceived by the*

* Apol. pro. S. V. M. lib. i., cap. 4.

*Holy Ghost, there was no doubt among the faithful.”** Up to this time there was no observance of the kind in any portion of the Western Church. Benedict XIV. says expressly, that “*until the time of St. Bernard, who died in the year 1153, the Feast of the Conception was not introduced into the Roman Church.*”†

And even later, in the year 1224, in a Council held at Oxford, under Stephen Langton, it was decreed, that “all the Festivals of the Blessed Virgin should be observed, *except the Festival of the Conception*, and this was not of *necessary obligation.*”‡ And this agrees with the usage of St. Alban, who *permitted* this commemoration to those who were inclined thereto by their especial devotion to the Virgin.

I wish to call your attention to the fact, that, on the authority of Romanists|| themselves, the Festival of the Conception was not known in any portion of the Western Church until the eleventh century; that then it was known only in a single country, and partially even there; that it was not enjoined, but only allowed to those whose superstitious veneration for the Virgin led them to embrace it; that it was not known in Rome until after the middle of the twelfth century; and that the idea of an *immaculate* conception was not supposed to be involved in the commemoration. It was designed simply as a memorial of the Divine beneficence to her from whom the Saviour should be born, and was observed in the same manner and for the same reason that the nativity of St. John the Baptist is celebrated among us.§

* Benedict XIV. *De Festo Conceptionis B. V. M.*, cap. xv., sec. 17, p. 228.

† *De Festo Conceptionis B. V. M.*, cap. xv., sec. 21.

‡ Andrew Rivet, *Apol. pro. S. V. M.* || This refers to Benedict, quoted above.

§ Andrew Rivet *Apol. pro. S. V. M.*, lib. ii., c. 13, and authorities there quoted.

This is the starting point of this commemoration in the Western Church, and these the facts connected with its origin.

From England the new Festival found its way to France, where it was to meet with a more rigid scrutiny. In the year 1136, certain priests of the Church at Lyons introduced a commemoration of the Conception, borrowing the idea from England. And now the way was open whereby the notion of the Virgin's freedom from original sin, which might have existed as a floating fancy, the food of dreamers and religious sentimentalists, could take its place among the subtle points of theological discussion, and struggle into the *dignity of an opinion*. *It was not then a tradition, still less an article of faith*. The slumbering germ of evil had broken through the ground, and was to grow like other "*tares until the harvest*."

Then it was regarded as a novelty. Men looked at it and wondered, and some, in whom the flame of earlier faith was not yet quite extinct, opposed it. First and foremost stands St. Bernard, and his testimony is the more convincing against this anti-Christian fancy from his known devotion to the Virgin. Hearing of this act of the Canons at Lyons, he wrote to them that most remarkable epistle, (known as the 174th,) in which he expresses his surprise at their presumption, and not only rebukes them for daring to set apart a festival unknown to the Church, but, in the most decisive terms, condemns the teaching which the festival might seem to honor. "I greatly wonder," he says, "that you should wish to change the proper ritual, by introducing a new commemoration, of which the ecclesiastical rite is ignorant, and which neither reason approves or the ancient tradition sustains."* He then goes on to draw

* St. Bernard, Epistle 174, ad Canones Lydunenses, A. D. MCXL., vol. i., p. 391.

a parallel between the conception of the Blessed Virgin and that of Jeremiah and St. John the Baptist, and argues that the same reason exists for the memorial of their conception as for hers. And again, he says: "I assert that the Blessed Virgin conceived CHRIST by the HOLY GHOST, but was not so conceived herself. The LORD JESUS alone was conceived by the HOLY GHOST. He alone before his conception was holy. With this single exception, each one who is born from Adam may truly and humbly acknowledge, *I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me.*" And again, "this (to accord the same exemption both to mother and to Son) is not to honor the Virgin, but to take away her honor."

I need not follow out his witness farther; but I wish you to observe, that St. Bernard, who is called the latest of the Fathers, and is canonized by Rome, and who is famous for his admiration of the Virgin, condemns this notion as a falsehood, and *degrading* instead of *honoring* its subject. Yet, notwithstanding this decided opposition, the doctrine, instinct with an evil life, grew on. In the century following, men became accustomed to it, as we are so easily familiarized with evil, and "the Festival of the Conception" became more common.

But the fancy of the *Immaculate* Conception was as yet too novel to be received. The schoolmen almost all rejected it. Peter Lombard, (known as the Master of the Sentences, whose writings have been a text-book of theology in the Roman Church for 400 years,) still in the same century with St. Bernard, opposed it. "The *flesh* of CHRIST,"* he writes, "whose high prerogatives cannot be declared by words, was liable to sin *in* the Virgin Mary, and in others through whom it was derived, until it came to be united

* Lombard, lib. iii., dis. iii. 3.

with Him. The flesh of CHRIST alone is not sinful flesh." Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, in the century following, says, "As to the sanctification of the Blessed Mary in the womb, there is nothing delivered to us in the canonical Scriptures, which do not even make mention of her birth." He speaks in the same way of her assumption into heaven, (another Romish fancy, alike without foundation in the Word of God,) and he goes on to specify a two-fold reason why the Blessed Virgin could not have been sanctified before her quickening in the womb. Again, he says, that "she * contracted original sin, because she was conceived according to the flesh, else she would not have needed the redemption through CHRIST; but it is written in the Scripture, that *"CHRIST is the Saviour of all men."*" Bonaventura, the cotemporary of Aquinas, a Cardinal of Rome, and known as "the Seraphic Doctor," noted likewise for his veneration of the Virgin, is explicit in his denial of her Immaculate Conception. "None is exempt from original corruption,"† he says, "but CHRIST alone." And, speaking of the various opinions as to the Virgin's sanctity, he says, that whatever "sanctification she received was *after* the contagion of original sin; and this, which is the more common mode of speaking, is likewise more reasonable and secure; clinging therefore to this position, we hold the prevalent opinion."

I do not quote these schoolmen as authorities to decide our faith, but to show that when they flourished, this dogma was not only not received, but, by the leading teachers of the Church of Rome, was opposed and censured as an error. By those, too, who were most extravagant in their admiration of the Virgin, and would have been the first,

* Thomas Aquinas, Summ. Theol. part iii., qu. xxvii., art. 2.

† Bonaventura, in 3 Sent. d. iii., art. i., qu. 2.

had there been the shadow of a reason, to accord to her the distinction ; and by some, *upon whose teachings Rome herself has set the seal of her infallibility, by ranking them among her saints. She has canonized them, and by her own principles has endorsed their doctrines, and has made them hers. And thus we see a Bernard, and a Bonaventura, and an Aquinas condemning as erroneous, a dogma which Pope Pius IX. declares to be "de fide" an article of faith, to be received by Christians, on peril of damnation ! Oh ! consistency, thou art a jewel !*

But the history is not ended. It is the opinion of a learned historian,* that the opposition of Aquinas and his fellow schoolmen would have corrected this error, had not Duns Scotus come forward to espouse its waning cause. He was a Franciscan monk, born about the middle of the thirteenth century, and the first schoolman who ventured to defend the Immaculate Conception. And it is worthy of our notice, that he defended it, not on the ground of revelation or tradition, but on that of God's omnipotence ; that *had He chosen, He could have freed the Blessed Virgin from the stain of sin.* Opposed to the Franciscan order, of which Scotus was the leader, stood the Dominicans, and between the two (though members of *an undivided Church*) there was the bitterest enmity. They quarrelled with each other on every opportunity ; each, filled with an unholy ambition, striving to gain ascendancy at Rome, and crush its rival.

The advocacy of *the Immaculate Conception* by Scotus, called forth, of course, the opposition of the Dominicans ; the honor of the two orders was involved ; and thenceforth, until long after the Council of Trent, the contest was continued ; and even to the present century, it has been the occasion of contention and jealousy.

* Gies. Eccl. History, period iii., div. iii., see 12 and 13 notes, ch. v., sec. 78.

It was disputed and debated, but there was no agreement. There were appeals to Rome to decide for one or for the other; but the infallible oracle was silent; it gave no response, except so vaguely that the answer only added other elements of discord. There were visions from the unseen world alleged in favor of each of the conflicting views. The Franciscans boasted of *St. Briggita*, to whom the Blessed Virgin revealed expressly that she *was not conceived in original sin*: And the Dominicans were favored by the visions of *St. Catherine of Sienna*, to whom it was divinely declared that “*the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin, but afterward cleansed therefrom.*” So, that according to these Saints, the Blessed Virgin could not herself remove the difficulty; and a revelation was insufficient to decide the controversy. And this was the condition of the two leading schools within the Church of Rome; not for a single year, or for a single generation, but for centuries. Discord, strife, confusion, lying wonders, ambitious struggles, subtle intrigues, in the Church, which now we are gravely taught to reverence as the seat of unity and home of peace; where every doubt can be allayed, and the yearning mind can find itself at rest. But was the question settled? Did the “Judge of Controversies” decide this controversy? Did the defender of the faith define the truth? Did the infallible voice speak out and satisfy the minds of men? Were the warring elements composed and gathered “*in the unity of spirit and the bond of peace,*” around the centre of unity? Far, far from it. The whole history of that controversy is one continued series of subtle intrigues, and under-handed double-dealing, in which the Pope, fearful to offend either of the disputants, strove to play them off against each other; and

avored, first the one, and then other, to make them both obsequious to his will. Such is the unity and honesty of Rome.

During the fifteenth century, the controversy raged with unabated vigor, and from time to time, received new elements of discord. The Council of Basle, which met in the year 1431, considered this, among the other discordant subjects which engaged its attention. In the year 1439, the Council, then in its thirty-sixth session, decreed* “that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from original and actual fault, is to be approved.” This was the first Conciliar action upon the subject; and it is remarkable, that this Council is proscribed by the Church of Rome as a schismatic assembly. To use the language of Canon Wordsworth,† “it is among the strange inconsistencies of her present position, that she now proposes to authorise a doctrine which was first propounded synodically by a Council which she herself censures. The so-called “Mother of Churches” borrows a new article of faith from a schismatical synod! and an infallible Pope, after four centuries, is enlightened by those whom his infallible predecessors condemned for heresy!” Thirty-seven years after this, (A. D. 1476) Sixtus IV., a Franciscan, then in the Papal chair, took advantage of his position to advance the favorite dogma of his order, and granted special indulgences to those who should observe a memorial of “*the Immaculate Conception*.” This was the first Papal edict upon the subject, emanating fitly from a man who used the Church for his own aggrandisement.‡

* Session xxxvi. Concil. Labbe xii. p. 623. † Occasional Sermons, 2d Series, p. 107-108.

‡ It was this Sixtus who was one of the conspirators against the Medici in Florence; and, with his nephew, the instigator of the murder of *Guiliano de Medici*, A. D. 1478. The murder was committed in *the Church of the Reparata*, on the 26th of April. The victim fell before the altar. He was stabbed as he raised the consecrated wafer. See Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo de Medici*, ch. iv. an. 1478, with authorities there given.

In the century following, the great Council of Trent assembled, and then it was earnestly hoped by the advocates of peace, that this, with other subjects of discord, would be set at rest. But, no. An infallible Council was as unable and unwilling as an infallible Pope, to define the faith and decide the controverted point. The Dominicans and Franciscans were present, and no decree must pass which could give offence to either. The question was discussed with bitterness. The strife between them reached such a height, that there was danger lest a schism should result. And yet that infallible Council, doubtful, divided and perplexed, could not decide the question. In the terse language of Richard Hooker, "the Fathers of Trent perceived, that if they should define of this matter, it would be dangerous, howsoever it were determined. If they freed her from original sin, the reasons against them are unanswerable, which Bonaventura and others do allege, but especially Thomas (Aquinas), whose will as much as may be, they follow. Again, if they did resolve the other way, they should control themselves in another thing, which in no case might be altered. For they profess to keep no day holy in the honor of an unholy thing; and the Virgin's conception they honor with a feast, which they could not abrogate without cancelling a constitution of Xystus Quartus. And that which is worse, the world might perhaps hereupon suspect, that if the Church of Rome did amiss before in this, it is not impossible for her to fail in other things."*

This then was their dilemma. They could not decide in favor of the Immaculate Conception without offending the Dominicans; and they could not decide against it, without alienating the Franciscans. How then was the ques-

* Answer to Travers, 13.

tion decided? *Why, it was not decided.* It was sagely thought, that discretion was the better part of valor, and since the See of Rome could not afford to lose either of the parties, she would retain them both, by ignoring any difference between them. Accordingly it was agreed, as a kind of compromise between the two, "*that there was no INTENTION to include the Blessed Virgin in the decrees concerning original sin.*"* "In the end," says Hooker, "they did wisely cut out their canon by a middle thread, establishing the feast of the Virgin's conception, and leaving the other question doubtful, as they found it; giving only a caveat, that no man should take the decree which pronounceth all mankind originally sinful, for a definitive sentence concerning the Blessed Virgin."† Doubtless we may acknowledge the *policy* of such a course, but how does it accord with *principle*? How can it be reconciled with the vain conceit, that we must look to Rome to decide our doubts? How does it compare with the prompt action of "*the apostles and elders*"‡ at the first council at Jerusalem to decide the prevailing doubts of Gentile converts? How does it agree with the bold and fearless maintenance of Catholic truth in the Councils of Niceæ, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon? *And how can it be reconciled with the last action of the Pontiff, who, on his own responsibility, declares that dogma to be an article of Christian faith, to be received and held on peril of our souls, which the Tridentine Synod covered over, and did not dare to touch, for fear of schism in the Church!*

But the argument is even stronger. For when, in the deliberations of the council, it was proposed that they should declare "that it was piously believed that the Blessed Virgin was conceived without original sin," the proposition

* Sarpi, pp. 164, 169, 171.

† Answer to Travers, 13.

‡ Acts xv. 1, *et seq.*

was rejected. And why? Because the prelates had before determined *not to condemn any opinion supposed to be prevalent in the Church*. Here, then, we see that the opinion that the Blessed Virgin *was* conceived in original sin was prevalent in the Church—that this opinion was so widely spread that it was unsafe to tamper with it—and, moreover, that it had such force that *an infallible council did not dare to contravene it*. It would have been a contravention, indeed, a condemnation, to have declared the *contrary opinion even pious*. In other words, had the Tridentine prelates decreed *that the Immaculate Conception was only a “pious opinion”*—not an article of faith—it would have been considered as a condemnation of the prevalent opinion that the conception was not immaculate. And therefore the council would not do so much as this.

What then must we think of one, who in his mad self-will has dared to go so far against a synod which his Church believes to be infallible, and *to declare that dogma to be an article of Christian faith which her assembled wisdom knew to be opposed, resisted and denied*. Trent knew, and based her action on the knowledge, that it was not the Church's faith, and Pius IX. has told us that it is,* and we must hold it, or else incur the anger of ALMIGHTY GOD, and his blessed Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul.

I cannot more appropriately show the true condition of the controversy at this period, than in the language of Melchior Canus, Professor of Theology at Salamanca, and Roman Bishop of the Canary Islands. “*All the holy men of old,*” he says, “*who have made mention of this subject, have asserted with one mouth that the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin.*” He then refers to Augustine, Chrysostom, Eusebius Emisennus, Remigius, Maximus, Bede, Anselm, Bernard, Erhard,

* Encyclic letter of Pius IX.

Antony of Padua, Bonaventura, Aquinas and others, specifying the places in their writings where they teach this doctrine. "*And none*," he adds, "*among the ancient holy Fathers taught otherwise.*"* This is the witness of one of the dignitaries of the Romish Church—one who stands prominent among the learned of his age—a Professor of Theology—a Provincial of the Dominicans at Castile—a Bishop, holding from the See of Rome—a member of the Council of Trent—he, writing in the sixteenth century, gives this plain, decisive testimony against the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This brings the history of the dogma to the beginning of the seventeenth century. I must sketch its after course more briefly.

It was not *then* an article of faith. Trent had not healed the schism in her children's hearts, although she had salved it over, lest it should prove a schism in the Church. But it was like the peace of which the prophet speaks; it was "*like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*"† In Spain, especially, the controversy was continued. There the rival parties carried on their contest, until the peace, not only of the Church, but of the State, was seriously endangered. Naturally, the King of Spain, Philip III., sent to the See of Rome, "the Judge of Controversies," to decide this controversy. But did he get an answer? Yes, such an answer as an Orphean Oracle might give, which could be read both ways, and which the disciples of St. Dominic or St. Francis might interpret at their will. And when new discords followed as the consequence, and the fourth Philip sent to Rome to have the question settled, did *he* get an answer? Yes and no! Yes, for there was an answer; no, for there was none. The Pope did not dare to give an answer. He was very

* See And. Riv.

† Isaiah lvii. 20.

prudent. True, the Franciscans were "the power behind the throne" in Spain, but then the Thomists were too powerful in the Church to be offended; he could not afford to lose them, and so he strove to humor and to keep them both. "The Franciscan cause was very plausible; the Dominicans must not assail it publicly; and the Franciscans must be no less gracious, and refrain from charging error on the Dominicans." *This was the solution of the question, and this the clear, unfaltering voice in which God's vicar upon earth resolved his children's doubts.* The history hastens to a close. In the early part of the eighteenth century, Clement XI., by a special edict, commanded all Romanists to observe a festival in memory of the conception of St. Mary, "a stranger to all sin." Yet this did not decide the controversy, and the Dominicans denied that the obligation of the law extended to them. As yet, it was not an article of faith for Christians to believe that the mother of the SAVIOUR was sinless in her conception. True, no pains were spared to imbue the minds of Romanists with the idea. It was incorporated into prayers, it was embalmed in verse, it was made the condition of especial blessings, so that the worship of the mother more than rivalled the adoration of the Son, but as yet it was not an article of faith. The Gospel was not yet, in this respect, enlarged. No revelation had as yet been made. Even Milner, the subtle, specious Milner, did not dream that it could ever be, and in all simplicity he wrote, in his "End of Controversy," "The Church does not decide the controversy concerning the conception of the Blessed Virgin, and several other disputed points, *because she sees nothing absolutely clear and certain concerning them*, either in the written or unwritten Word, and therefore leaves her children to form their own opinions concerning them."*

* The End of Religious Controversy, N. Y., D. & J. Sadlier, p. 109.

But with the accession of the present Pontiff the opportunity was given to take a bolder step in sin. The *tare* had grown for centuries, and was now to ripen for an awful harvest.

Jesuitism was in the ascendant. Ultramontainism was triumphant. The purer portions of the Roman Church were crushed, and had lost the power, if not the will, to resist the evil: and the blow was struck. Pius IX., then an exile at Gaeta, addressed an encyclic letter, on the 2d of February, 1849, "to all Patriarchs, Primates and Bishops" of the Roman Church, in which he proposed this question; "whether the Blessed Virgin Mary was exempt from original sin?"

"We rejoice," he says, "to find that an ardent desire has been revived in the Catholic world, that it *should at length be determined*, in a solemn judgment, by this Apostolic See, that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. In consequence of this wish, and of earnest solicitations to that effect, we have granted that the title of *Immaculate* should be applied to her *conception* in the public liturgies of the Church. Still, many persons are surprised that the Roman Church and Apostolic See has not yet decreed that title of honor, which the common piety of the faithful so anxiously craves should be ascribed to her." He then exhorts the bishops whom he addresses to communicate their own sentiments on the subject, with a view to the final decision of this question *by his own supreme authority*. From this letter it is evident, that up to the 2d day of February, A. D. 1849, "*the Immaculate Conception*" was *not* an article of Christian faith; therefore *not necessary to salvation*—that the Church of Rome, up to that date, was doubtful whether the LORD JESUS CHRIST was the only sinless being or not—that, notwithstanding this uncertainty,

her permission had been given to invoke the Blessed Virgin as *Immaculate*—that she regarded “Christianity as imperfect, and the Gospel preached by CHRIST and His apostles as defective, and had remained incomplete for eighteen hundred years”—that, “if now, in the middle of the nineteenth century, it still remains that new articles should be added to the Christian *faith once delivered to the saints*, it is impossible to say how many new articles may be added hereafter.”* Moreover, that she hereby forsakes on *principle* what she has long since abandoned in *practice*; *the test of antiquity as one of the criteria of truth, and claims the power of making new articles of faith*, and adding to the Gospel, and narrowing up the already *narrow way that leadeth unto life*, by imposing conditions of salvation which the LORD did not require—and all this mass of blasphemy and heresy and sin to be bound down upon the Christian world—by whom? or what?—a council of the universal Church? a synod, even of the Church of Rome? No! *but by the Pope’s supreme authority!*

And it was done. The eighth of last December, the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, was fixed upon to consummate the sin. True, there were voices raised in protest against the act. From France, one noble witness for the truth spoke boldly to the Pope, and implored him not to yield to the temptation. “Flattery,”† he says, “does not cease to allure you. It asserts that you will acquire great glory in the sight of man, and will confirm the domination of the Bishop of Rome over the universal Church, if, by a decree of faith, binding on all Christians, you terminate a question which none of your predecessors, nor any synod, had dared thus to define. These

* See Wordsworth’s sermon on “a Recent Proposal,” &c.

† See the Abbe Laborde’s letter to Pius IX.

are the wiles of the Serpent, for should it happen to your blessedness to command the reception of such a dogma, you will acquire for yourself, not glory, but ignominy; for the Bishop of Rome, not domination but derision. It will be another and a new argument, after so many proofs from history, that the Bishop of Rome is, like all other men, a weak man, prone to sin, obnoxious to error; and that it may happen that he may become a prevaricator in his holy office, and be deceived and endeavor to deceive. Hear us rather, well beloved Father, us who seek the true glory of your holiness, not by adulation, but by the love of truth, of charity, and of peace." This was the faithful witness from one portion of the Church. It was the last gasp for liberty and life, before she sank exhausted in the serpent folds of Jesuitism; and it was all in vain.

"The working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness," had done its work—"and for this cause God" sent *"them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."** The deed was done; and done with such exaggeration of impiety, that, at a single blow, the Gospel was transformed, "the faith" destroyed, the remains of liberty within the Roman Church crushed to the very dust, and the last and strongest evidence which history has known, afforded of the approaching revelation *"of that man of sin, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called GOD, or is worshipped"*—"that Wicked, whom the LORD shall consume with the Spirit of His wrath, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming."†

My brethren, it is from no love of controversy that I have spoken thus plainly and at this length, upon this theme. Bound by my Priestly vows, "with all diligence to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and

* 1 Thess. ii. 9, 10, 11.

† 2 Thess. ii. 4, 8.

strange doctrines contrary to God's Word," I must guard you against this error. For I tell you, that it is not a *sleeping* falsehood. It has enlisted and will enlist all that the Devil can invent of subtlety, deceit and guile, to sustain its cause; for never, in the history of Christendom, has so bold a step been taken in raising up a rival for the worship which is due to God alone.

And in the efforts which have been already made to maintain this dogma, we see an earnest of what may be expected. Even now, just in the first dew of birth, all that its advocates have dared to say in its support has rested on a falsehood. Facts have been perverted, history misrepresented, and as the arch-deceiver showed himself "at home" in Scripture, when he would seduce the Lord, so does he show himself "at home" in history to betray His Church. I caution you, my brethren, to beware. No effort will be spared, no falsehood left untried, no history left unfalsified, which can by any process be tortured to support this dogma. Therefore do I warn you, and therefore would I store your minds with facts, and fill your hearts with truth, that you "may withstand in this evil day, and having done all, to stand."

I have thus far spoken chiefly of the history of this dogma, and have only incidentally touched upon its doctrinal bearings. I cannot leave the subject, without stating to you, briefly, what are the results flowing from this new addition to Christianity; and I do it, that you may judge more clearly of its anti-Christian character, from these its anti-Christian consequences.

If this dogma be true, then it follows, in contradiction to God's Holy Word, that the doctrine of original sin, viz. that there is a "fault and corruption of the nature of *every* man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam"

is untrue, since she, who was so descended, is exempted from that universal law, and the Scriptures which teach that *all are sinful, or have sinned*, are falsified in her.

Again, if it be true, then she was exempted from the law of death; for “*Death has passed on all men, for that all have sinned.*”* She, therefore, being sinless, must have been immortal, and must either now be living upon earth, or else must, in her body, have been translated (without death) into heaven.

Again, if it be true, then the Blessed Virgin, being free from all sin, whether original or actual, could have no need whatever of a SAVIOUR. He is not the Saviour of those who are not fallen, and therefore is not *hers*. And yet, taught by the HOLY GHOST, she says, “*my soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*† And the LORD Himself has taught us that *they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*; that not the *sinless*, but the *sinful*, need a Saviour.‡

Again, if it be true, then CHRIST was not the only sinless one, and all those passages of Scripture which point to Him as being *only holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*, are shorn of all their meaning.

Again, if it be true, it mars the parallel between the first and second Adam, and breaks down at once the Apostle’s argument, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, which makes the blessings flowing from the *one man*, JESUS CHRIST, co-extensive with the evils flowing from the first man, Adam; for it makes the Blessed Virgin, not the LORD, the source of purity. And this, indeed, is plainly taught in many Romish books of devotion.

Again, if it be true, there is no longer any peculiarity in His conception by the HOLY GHOST, and the Scriptures and

* Romans v. 12.

† Luke i. 46, 47.

‡ Matt. ix. 12.

the creeds should have said of *her*, as they do of Him, "*conceived by the HOLY GHOST.*"

Again, if it be true, then she was a co-agent with the Blessed Spirit in imparting to her offspring a sinless humanity. He derived it from *her*, no less than from the HOLY GHOST; and GOD, who alone can *bring a clean thing out of an unclean*, is made to share the glory of the miracle with a creature of His hand.

Again, if it be true, the Blessed Mary is herself removed from all connexion with the human family. She is not a member of the old creation; that entail has been cut off. She is not a member of the new creation, for that creation starts with the Incarnation, *after her own conception*. She therefore has no part either with the first or second Adam. Where and what then (on this supposition) is she? Just what this dogma is, a figment of the imagination.

Again, if it be true, then was there, before the Incarnation, a sinless humanity; and all, yea, more than all the blessings flowing to mankind from the union of the divine and human, in "*the man CHRIST JESUS,*" had been realized *before* that union was accomplished.

Again, if it be true, then was the miracle of her Immaculate Conception greater even than her own conception of that *Holy Child*, through the over-shadowing of the HOLY GHOST. She was *born of the will of the flesh*, of sinful parents. He was conceived by the HOLY GHOST. In one case, there was *the will of God*; in the other, *the will of man*; and if in both the effects were equal, then in the latter the miracle was greater. And hence it follows, that the birth of Mary was a greater miracle than the Incarnation of the SON of God.

And more, (I am now using St. Bernard's argument,) the principle may and ought to be carried out still far-

ther. If, in His case, the mother must be sinless to conceive and bare a sinless one, then, (if she were sinless) *her* parents must be likewise free from sin. And thus the difficulty is removed only a generation farther back; and there is no reason why Joachim and Anna, the reputed parents of St. Mary, should not likewise be exempted; and so through the whole line of Messianic descent, including Rahab, who was an harlot, and Thamar, who committed incest, and Bathsheba, whose history you know.

And it is well, perhaps, to think *why* these characters are recorded in the Bible. May it not be to teach us, that from the grossest and the sinliest God can raise the *holiest*? and perhaps to warn us, lest, if we carry out our human reasonings, regardless of His revelation, we may be led to class an adulteress and a harlot with the Blessed Mother of our LORD? This Romish dogma, carried out to its legitimate results, will bind the Blessed Mary and the adulteress Bathsheba, and the incestuous Thamar, and the harlot Rahab, in the same bonds, and present them all as free from original corruption, and spotless before God!

Again, this dogma, if it be true, invalidates the doctrine of the Incarnation of the SON of GOD. If she were not really and truly woman, (as she could not be, if she were exempted from the law of our humanity,) then He was not really and truly *man*. And hence the whole system of Christianity, which is based upon the fact that GOD and *man* have met in CHRIST, and that man can have no access to his GOD except through Him who is both GOD and *man*, is brought to naught. Rome has proclaimed *another Gospel which is not a Gospel*, and invoked upon her devoted head the anathema uttered by the HOLY GHOST through an inspired apostle of the LORD.* And, lastly, the Church of

* Gal. i., 7, 8, 9.

Rome, in striking thus at the root of Christianity, by invalidating the reality of the Incarnation, has gone a step still farther in fastening on herself that mark of Antichrist, in thus denying practically that JESUS CHRIST *is come in the flesh.*"*

These, my brethren, are the plain, legitimate consequences of this new dogma. You see that they are anti-Christian—that they contradict the Bible—that they impair the creeds—that they need another revelation to sustain them—that they teach another than the Gospel which our Blessed LORD has given, and his apostles *fully* taught.† It is not *the Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST*; it is something *which is not a Gospel*, by which the Devil would supplant it. And if from history you have learned the novelty of this strange fancy, from the Scriptures and the Church you may learn its anti-Christian character. I warn you to beware of it. It is the last and subtlest of the Devil's devices to betray the Church, to destroy the souls of men, to dishonor JESUS CHRIST, and to draw us from our God. He would sap the firm foundations of His everlasting throne, and raise a rival to receive the homage and the adoration of mankind. He would dethrone the KING *of kings*, and lead us to *the Queen of Heaven* as our LORD.

But underneath it all, the Devil lies. Baal and Ashtaroth and Moloch were the idols through which he seduced the Israelites; and the Saints, and Martyrs, and chief of all, the Blessed Mary, are the ones through whom he would betray the Christian. Beware, beloved, lest you bow the knee to any but the LORD; or dare to offer up a prayer through any other than our *Saviour* JESUS CHRIST.

One closing thought.

*1 John iv., 2, 3.

† Rom. xv. 19; Acts xx. 27.

The Virgin's blessedness was great; but there is a *greater* blessedness which may be ours: a blessedness assured to us, not by a false successor of St. Peter, but by St. Peter's LORD and ours; and it is written, not in human traditions, but in the Word of God. "For, as He taught the people, *a certain woman lifted up her voice and said, blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps that Thou hast sucked.*"* This was His mother's blessedness; and He acknowledged it. Yea, she is blessed—but there is a greater blessedness than this. "*But He said, yea, RATHER blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.*"† Let us strive, my brethren, to make this higher blessedness our own. And she may be doubly *blessed* to us as our guide. She may teach us faith, humility, gentleness, thoughtfulness, meditation upon God's Holy Word, obedience, listening to and following out God's blessed will; and she may teach us too, to rest upon the SAVIOUR, Who redeemed her, in Whom her soul rejoiced, and to magnify her LORD and ours. These are the blessed lessons she has left for us; and none would be more quick than she, to frown upon those other teachings which would remove her from her high position as the *handmaid of the LORD*.

Let us honor her as *blessed among women*, and admire and imitate the virtues which mark her out as among the holiest of God's Saints. But let us never trench upon the honor due to Him, or degrade her as a rival or usurper, in our hearts. She is His *handmaid*, not his rival; she is the creature of His hand, and not His Queen to usurp His Throne; she is the *saved*, and not the SAVIOUR; the recipient of His mercy, not the advocate for man. And if you wish to know how far your

* St. Luke, xi. 27, 28.

† St. Luke, xi. 28.

admiration for the SAVIOUR's mother may extend, and yet be safe from sin, I give it to you in the language of a Father writing on this very theme:* “Let Mary be held in honor, but let the FATHER, and the SON and HOLY GHOST be worshipped; let Mary never be worshipped; *let her be honored and esteemed; let Him be worshipped and adored!*”

* St. Epiphanius, Haeres. 79. sec. 7.

